

The first performances of *Amadis de Gaule*

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After receiving the libretto for *Amadis*, Johann Christian Bach stayed for long enough in Paris to get to know the style and conventions of French opera, the singers of the company and the workings of the Académie Royale de Musique, alias the Paris Opéra. The latter was then the most renowned opera company in Europe, housed at that time in the magnificent Salle du Palais-Royal, later destroyed by fire (1781). There several dozen artists – singers, dancers and musicians – went about their daily activities throughout the year.

During the 1770s, the Académie Royale had settled the difficult question of finding successors for the singers who had made the institution so famous in the years 1730-1750, particularly through their performances of the masterpieces of Jean-Philippe Rameau. Jélyotte, Gélín, Mesdemoiselles Sallé, Fel and Chevalier had gone from triumph to triumph for many years, and when they all left within a very short time of each other, the Académie was deeply shaken and the directors of that time, Rebel and Francoeur (1757-1767), then Trial and Berton (1767-1769), found themselves faced with a problem that was not easy to solve. Jélyotte's retirement alone, in 1755, betokened the crisis the Opéra was then going through: even twelve years later, in 1767, the administration was still vainly trying to get him to return to the stage. Indeed, Pillot, who had been engaged to succeed him, was not at all in the same category. So much had

the quality of the company declined that the most vocally demanding pieces in the repertoire, notably those of Rameau, could no longer be presented. And of course, attendance suffered as a result. The directors therefore had but one obsession: the engagement, by whatever means, of singers who were capable of reviving the Opéra's reputation. And the leading roles in *Amadis* are a perfect illustration of their success. The *basse-taille* Larrivée and the *haute-contre* Legros, who had been recruited when they were very young, around 1760, had become veritable demigods of the operatic world by the mid-1770s. So when Johann Christian Bach's work came to be presented in 1779, the cast, although not completely beyond reproach, was a very attractive one indeed.

The part of Amadis was taken by Joseph Legros (1739-1793) who, since his début at the Opéra in 1764, had premiered or revived a long list of roles. These included, for Lully, Renaud in *Armide* (1764) and the title role in *Amadis* (1771); for Rameau, the title roles in *Castor & Pollux* (1765, 1772, 1773, 1778), *Hippolyte & Aricie* (1767) and *Dardanus* (1768, 1769); for Gluck, Achille in *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774, 1781), the title role in *Orphée & Eurydice* (1775, 1780), Admète in *Alceste* (1776, 1779) and Pylade in *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779). For Piccinni he took the part of Médor in *Roland* (1778) and the title role in *Atys* (1780, 1783); for Grétry, he was Pyrrhus in *Andromaque* (1780); for Gossec, he took the title role in *Thésée* (1782); for Sacchini, the title role in *Renaud* (1783); and so on. In his early years as a singer, Legros had a voice that was strong, flexible and ideal for the performance of vocalises, while shortly before his retirement it was heroic and powerful. Although his voice was recognised as being exceptional, it never quite matched up to that of the unforgettable Pierre Jélyotte. 'He still lacks the exquisite taste that his predecessor is said to have carried to the very highest degree. It is true that he does not need that quality so much today, having become more of an actor through Gluck, so he replaces the charms of an *ariette* sung to the most exquisite perfection with the energy and impetuosity of the great passions.' (*L'Espion anglais*, 29 May 1776.) But although Legros had an expressive voice, he was not a good actor. 'Legros bellows with the finest voice in

the world, but he is not right as Achille; there is only one thing more awkward and heavier than his appearance, and that is his style of acting,' reported Friedrich Melchior Grimm after the première of *Iphigénie en Aulide* (*Correspondance littéraire*, April 1774). The singer had already taken the part of Amadis in the 1771 revival of Lully's work and then too his acting had been deemed unconvincing: 'The part of Amadis is not well acted by Monsieur Legros, but as a singer he produces the most beautiful sounds, and his voice seems here to take on a new vigour.' (*Mémoires secrets*, 1 December 1771.) His performance in Bach's *tragédie* in 1779 seems on the whole to have satisfied the critics, however. Not only did 'Monsieur Legros sing the role of Amadis to everyone's satisfaction' (*Mercur de France*, December 1779, p. 196), but his voice 'seems to have become younger; the charms of his singing were singularly applauded' (*Journal de Paris*, 15 December 1779). No doubt the nature of the role contributed to his success: Legros was more suited to singing shepherds or sentimental lovers than courageous heroes or characters with very strong personalities. And in the shorter version of the *Amadis* libretto, Amadis, although we know he is a brave knight, appears mostly in scenes of languor and love, singing tender airs and taking part in delicate duets – we are far from the strong type of singing that is required for characters such as Achille, Admète or Pylade – which was just as well for Legros. Unfortunately, however, he did not manage to avoid the one pitfall for him in the work: the one heroic scene, containing the fight between Amadis and Arcalaüs (Act I, Scene 7). And the singer who took the part of Arcalaüs does not seem to have fared any better: 'We were surprised to see Arcalaüs rooted to the spot when challenged by Amadis, and calling the demons to his aid without having put up a fight,' reported the *Mercur de France* (December 1779, p. 197); 'we were none the less surprised to see Amadis strolling nonchalantly towards the monsters called up by Arcalaüs, and barely aiming a blow at them with his sword.'

Marie-Rose-Claude-Josèphe Levasseur, known as Rosalie Levasseur (1749-1826), showed her skills as Oriane. For some years after her début at the Paris Opéra in the mid-1760s she had taken only minor roles. The

part of Éponine in Gossec's *Sabinus* (1774) brought her some attention, then in 1776 she was given the title role in Gluck's *Alceste*, which boosted her career. The composer had insisted that she take the part, despite all opposition and regardless of the recriminations of her rival Sophie Arnould, who had sung the title roles in his *Iphigénie en Aulide* and *Orphée & Eurydice*, and whose voice, light rather than dramatic, was not to the Austrian composer's liking. But Rosalie Levasseur was not armed to take on such a repertoire; she had not acquired the necessary technique for a type of singing that was much more lyrical and more demanding than what she had been used to, and within a matter of years her voice was damaged. 'Her screaming has ruined her voice as a singer' and she was 'so poorly received as Armide that she gave up the work after the third performance', noted Baron Grimm after the première of Sacchini's *Renaud* in 1783 (*Correspondance littéraire*, March 1783). 'The music of Gluck has been the death of Mademoiselle Levasseur,' he concluded (*Correspondance littéraire*, September 1782). During the few years her glory lasted, she nevertheless sang about ten major roles, including Éponine (*Sabinus*, Gossec, 1774), Alceste (*Alceste*, Gluck, 1776, 1779), Armide (*Armide*, Gluck, 1777), Angélique (*Roland*, Piccinni, 1778), Iphigénie (*Iphigénie en Tauride*, Gluck, 1779, 1782), Andromaque (*Andromaque*, Grétry, 1780), Andromède (*Persée*, Philidor, 1780) and Armide (*Renaud*, Sacchini, 1783). Although she did not retire for good until 1785, the management of the Opéra had already stated in 1783 that 'Mademoiselle Levasseur, who sang successfully for four years, has done scarcely anything for several years past, and henceforth is unable to do anything; her abilities appear to be unequal to the modern genre. One cannot hide the fact that she shows much unwillingness and even that she costs the Opéra a great deal, laying all sorts of claims for her wardrobe, which is never expensive enough or fine enough. The special salary of 9,000 livres which she has obtained has not only disgusted her fellow singers, seeing that she does not earn it, but has prompted others to make similar demands, and this is necessarily a burden upon the administration. It is nine months since she last appeared on stage, she has been at the Opéra for eighteen years, but as

a principal singer only since the retirement of Mesdemoiselles Arnoult and Beaumesnil. Were she to be granted a pension of 2,000 livres, for which normally she would have to have worked at the Opéra for twenty years, it would be favouring her, for we owe her only 1,500 livres; but even at 2,000 livres it would be a good bargain for the Opéra.' (*État de tous les sujets du chant et des chœurs de l'Académie royale de musique*, 1783.) Shortly before the première of *Amadis*, Mademoiselle Levasseur experienced the first symptoms of her forthcoming decline. In August 1779 she fell ill: 'The sublime role of Iphigénie has finally got the better of Mademoiselle Rosalie Levasseur; she has coughed up blood several times and it is to be feared that she will have to give up the stage altogether. [...] This might be alarming for Gluck, were he not sure of having created for us a national music, for the performance of which France can be lacking neither in talents, nor in voices. What is to be feared is that it will be necessary to change the singers rather often; but how will that affect the glory of the new Orpheus?' (*Correspondence*, August 1779). However, she apparently made a quick recovery and was soon the main attraction in the performances of *Amadis*: 'Mademoiselle Levasseur, who is noted for her ability to embody the character she is playing, has aroused great interest as Oriane: she rendered with the truest expression and the greatest tenderness the very pathetic piece in which she thinks Amadis, lying in the grass, is dead.' (*Journal de Paris*, 15 December, 1779.)

Madeleine-Céleste Fieuzal de Frossac, known as Mademoiselle Durancy (1746-1780), was nearing the end of her career when she took the role of Arcabonne. Although she had been at the Académie Royale since 1762, she had yet to obtain public acclaim. She had sung the part of Urgande in the 1771 revival of Lully's *Amadis* (a more important role in the five-act version of the libretto than in the one of 1779) and had not made a very good impression: 'Mademoiselle Durancy, whose voice is harsh, off key and discordant, spoils the beauty of the prologue utterly.' (*Mémoires secrets*, 1 December 1771.) Generally speaking, she was considered to be 'overemotional and shrill' (*ibid.*, 1 December 1768), with the kind of voice that those who still remembered Marie Fel and Sophie

Arnould 'were loath to accept' (*ibid.*, 13 December 1768). Furthermore, Rosalie Duplant (1745-?) soon became her understudy, outshining her in no time and beginning to take on leading roles, although apparently her voice was not much more pleasing to the ear than her rival's, but it was more impressive. When Grimm heard her in Piccinni's *Atys* in 1780, he remarked: 'Of all the roles Mademoiselle Duplant has played in the past fifteen years, Cybèle is the first in which she has taken it into her head to sing in key occasionally' (*Correspondance littéraire*, March 1780) – a feat she nevertheless managed to repeat when she sang Médée in Gossec's *Thésée*, première two years later. Meanwhile, Mademoiselle Durancy had nevertheless worked her way up to the position of *première chanteuse*, specialising in the roles of mothers and enchantresses, and in 1779 she was given the part of Arcabonne, which the critics saw as being the 'principal' role in *Amadis*, because 'she is almost constantly on stage' (*Journal de Paris*, 15 December 1779). Amazingly, she achieved a triumph; everyone was forced to admit that 'Mademoiselle Durancy showed superior talent as Arcabonne. Energy, dignity, warmth, intelligence, she left nothing to be desired.' (*Mercure de France*, December 1779, p. 197.) Some even paid vibrant tributes to her, as if to make up for years of unjustified contempt: 'It is amazing that, having proved her talent so often, having so frequently drawn applause in the most difficult roles and aroused the audience's enthusiasm, Mademoiselle Durancy does not enjoy all the esteem she deserves. Every day we hear praise of singers who do not bear comparison with her, and she is not even mentioned! Are there circumstances that make reputations, or ones that impede them?' (*Ibid.*) The singer's sudden death a few months later was variously received. While her ruthless colleague Legros is said to have exclaimed in the middle of a committee meeting, 'She is dead! Good! She cost us more money than she was worth!' (Dauvergne, letter to Papillon de La Ferté, 1781), others underlined the ambiguity of her talent: 'Mademoiselle Durancy, as a *comédienne* and the Opéra's most distinguished *sujet*, still felt that she was being persecuted. She did not have the success she deserved, because she had a voice that was almost as unpleasant as

her appearance.' (Campardon, *L'Académie royale de musique au XVIII^e siècle*, p. 188.)

The *basse-taille* (low tenor, i.e. baritone) Henri Larrivée (1737-1802) was no doubt the most compelling and also the most celebrated of the singers who took part in *Amadis*. He had begun his career as a soloist at the Opéra in 1755 and he did not retire until 1786. 'The artist, who had everything – a good figure, a wide range, a flexible voice, and acting that was both natural and intelligent – deserved the applause he received over a career spanning more than thirty years. Almost every new work in which he appeared was a success.' (Campardon, *L'Académie royale de musique au XVIII^e siècle*, p. 76.) Larrivée played a major role in the development of French opera, since his success was bound up with that of Gluck: he received and assimilated the composer's new dramatic requirements with enthusiasm – much to the relief of the latter, who had initially feared the resistance of the Opéra's principal singers. Gluck found in Larrivée an efficient ally for his 'reform' operas. The singer's many roles show how his voice matured, moving from a flexible lyricism to a powerful and sonorous heroism: Orcan (*Les Paladins*, Rameau, 1760), Pluton (*Hippolyte & Aricie*, Rameau, 1767), Agamemnon (*Iphigénie en Aulide*, Gluck, 1774, 1780, 1783), Sabinus (*Sabinus*, Gossec, 1774), Roland (*Roland*, Piccinni, 1778), Hercule (*Alceste*, Gluck, 1779), Oreste (*Iphigénie en Tauride*, Gluck, 1779, 1780), Oreste (*Andromaque*, Grétry, 1780, 1781), Égée (*Thésée*, Gossec, 1782), Iarbe (*Didon*, Piccinni, 1783), Florestan (*La Caravane du Caire*, Grétry, 1784), Danaüs (*Les Danaïdes*, Salieri, 1784). 'Monsieur Larrivée's talent is essential to the Opéra' (*État de tous les sujets du chant et des chœurs de l'Académie royale de musique*, 1783); 'he is undoubtedly [its] principal actor' (*Mémoires secrets*, 6 January 1772). In reality his demands weighed heavily on the institution, both financially and socially. Shortly before the first performance of *Amadis*, the Opéra nevertheless succeeded in binding the obstreperous singer by contract, which he signed on 17 April 1779, agreeing to play the 'principal *basse-taille* roles in which he was cast, in all new works or revivals at the theatre, without shirking his obligation under any pretext whatsoever' (letter from Devisme,

17 April 1779), except in the event of illness, accident and other cases of *force majeure*; otherwise his engagement would be nullified together with the related salaries amounting to 15,000 livres per annum (a handsome sum). Despite that guarantee, Larrivée was unable to take the role Johann Christian Bach had intended for him: 'An inflammatory disease, followed by an inevitably long convalescence, prevent both Monsieur Bach and the public from seeing Monsieur Larrivée in the role of Arcalaüs at this time. His part was taken by Monsieur Moreau, who seems to be a worthy replacement; he was greatly applauded.' (*Journal de Paris*, 15 December 1779.)

We know very little about Monsieur Moreau, who was then at the beginning of his career. He had joined the Académie Royale de Musique in 1772, but had rarely been heard as a soloist. He had originally been cast as La Haine (Hatred), a role that was taken over by a young singer by the name of Chéron, who had been recruited the previous year. As Urgande, Mademoiselle Châteauvieux – 'a fine voice for important secondary roles, such as priestesses, divinities in the glory [representation of the heavens]; but not strong enough for major roles; however, most useful at the Académie' (*État de tous les sujets du chant et des chœurs de l'Académie royale de musique*, 1783) – must have performed her role reasonably well, because no one appears to have commented on it. The role of Discord was taken by Lainez, also new to the Académie (he had appeared in *Écho & Narcisse* two months previously). The singer named Péré was the voice of the Ghost of Ardan Canil. Finally, three young newcomers, Mesdemoiselles Gavaudan, Joinville and Girardin, took the parts of enchantresses and captives.

The singers brought together for *Amadis de Gaule* were of the finest. But could the Académie Royale really be proud of its principal artists in 1779? Levasseur, spitting blood and already on the decline; Durancy, to everyone's surprise, not as bad as usual; Legros, vocally excellent but awkward as an actor; and Larrivée replaced by an inexperienced understudy. Was *Amadis* really in such good hands?



Apart from the soloists, there was also a large chorus on stage, and many dancers took part in the ballet; in the orchestra pit was an ensemble to the likes of which Johann Christian Bach had probably never before had access. Conducted by François-Joseph Francœur (1738-1804) and his assistant and successor Jean-Baptiste Rey (1734-1810), the orchestra had been modified slightly by Devisme when he took over as director of the Académie Royale de Musique. At that time there had been 62 musicians: 24 violins, 6 violas, 10 cellos, 4 double basses, 7 flutes-and-oboes, 2 clarinets, 4 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, and timpani. Since its creation under Louis XIV the Académie boasted in its orchestra the most skilful musicians in the kingdom, including Marais, Stück, Montéclair, Rebel, Francœur, Leclair, Mondonville, Dauvergne, Rodolphe, Blavet, Kreutzer and others. Recognised as the finest in the whole of Europe, the orchestra was also one of the largest. Increasing the number of sections, with the aim of making 'modern' music all the more sonorous, was a concern shared by all successive directors. During their term of office, Trial and Berton (1767-1769) increased the numbers of musicians, singers and dancers significantly (see *Mémoires secrets*, 13 May 1767), their objective being as much to eliminate second-rate performers as to adapt the whole company to the new requirements of the music that was being composed at that time. 'With some arrangements [...] it is hoped that the praise which has always been reserved for the talented musicians who make up [the orchestra] will be increased by the clarity, precision and sparkling performance that must result from the project proposed by the new directors,' Trial and Berton told the minister (*Mémoire de Messrs Trial et Le Berton à M. le duc de St Florentin*, 1767). In increasing the ensemble 'by fifteen musicians' (*Affiches, annonces, et avis divers*, 10 June 1767, p. 92), they met the recommendations of Ancelet who, ten years previously, had already expressed the opinion that 'the orchestra of the Opéra [...] is not large enough'. (Ancelet, *Observations sur la musique, les musiciens et les instruments*, p. 9.) According to the *Mercure de France* (June 1767, p. 174), the addition by Berton and Trial of 'a dozen or more instruments, not only violins and double basses, but also oboes, bassoons, etc., has had

an excellent effect and has brought new splendour to the great symphonies, which were applauded and appreciated more than before. The felicitous choice of the finest symphonists of our time has made those additions even more advantageous. We can now give the orchestra of our Opéra all the superiority that befits the magnificence of this great spectacle.’ (*Mercure de France*, June 1767, p. 174.) That was the orchestra Gluck discovered when he moved to the French capital in 1774, and for which he wrote his *Iphigénie en Aulide*. Subsequent changes did not really affect the size of the ensemble: the clarinets and horns were given permanent positions, the trumpet section was doubled (until the early 1770s there had been only one trumpet), the number of violas was set at six, the basso continuo was eliminated, and certain instruments hitherto rarely used (notably the harp and the trombones) were allowed to appear more frequently. Nevertheless, those improvements failed to remedy one of the orchestra’s recognised defects. Indeed, a century of musical practice had, according to some, turned its performances into a ‘blind and barbarous routine’, with the instrumentalists incapable of accompanying the singers because they lacked the ‘intelligence and a feeling for *forte-piano*’ (Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, p. 166). The orchestra of the Paris Opéra, ‘still unamenable to the efforts of the author of *Iphigénie*, sounds as always like an old coach drawn by skinny horses and driven by a man born deaf. So far it has been impossible to communicate to that heavy mass any kind of flexibility. It will remain in the same inertia for as long as talented young artists with passions just waiting to be fired are subject to such bespectacled musicians, made apathetic by old age, satiety [and] routine,’ concluded Mercier (*ibid.*) in the late 1770s. And the recriminations of audiences were to no avail: ‘The principals [...], more symphonists than musicians, [...] still believe the voices are there to accompany their violins and double basses. In vain the audience shout that they cannot hear the words [...]: nothing can cure them of the French obsession that all music has to be noisy and confused. Anyone would think it were not possible to stir the heart without bursting the eardrum.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 167.) Yet, with great skill, Johann Christian Bach made the most of that orches-

tra, for which he wrote brilliant symphonic passages, including a very elaborate overture in the form of a three-movement symphony; he created accompaniments that were both dynamic and subtle, multiplying the virtuosic passages for the strings and bringing out the colouring of all the wind instruments. The clarinets, horns and trombones are used admirably (e.g. for the moaning that emerges from the tomb of Ardan Canil), while the first flute, first oboe and first bassoon are given solos worthy of their virtuosity in some of the ballet numbers.

The ballets were more impressive still. In the course of the three acts of *Amadis* there were parts for ten or so soloists, with about forty dancers in the accompanying corps de ballet. The finest dancers France could offer appeared in the work: the famous Marie-Madeleine Guimard (1743-1816) danced the role of a demon transformed into a shepherdess in Act I, and in Act II appeared Jean Bercher, better known as Dauberval (1742-1806), Marie Allard (1742-1802) and Marguerite-Angelique Peslin (1748-?). And the final divertissement must have been dazzling, with Gaetano Apolline Baldassare Vestris (1729-1808), known as 'le dieu de la danse', his son by the dancer Marie Allard, Marie-Jean Augustin, known as Auguste Vestris (1760-1842), Maximilien Léopold Philippe Joseph Gardel, known as Gardel *l'aîné* (1741-1787), his brother Pierre Gardel, known as Gardel *cadet* (1758-1833), and Anna Friedricke, known as Anne Heinel (1753-1808). Two generations of artists appeared side by side: the ballet masters of the Académie (Dauberval, Vestris and Gardel) and the *premiers sujets*. However, we must remember that the Académie was going through a difficult period at that time, and the dancers, even more than the singers, appear to have done their best to make things difficult for its director, whom they held in deep contempt. Devisme was the target at that time, but his successors, Berton and Dauvergne, were treated no better. In 1781 Dauvergne noted that in recent years the artists had 'considered the Opéra to be their property, and thought they were free to use it absolutely as they pleased; consequently, they felt their power was boundless'. And to get their own back on the directors for taking a firm stand, they sought to do harm 'by taking little care over the performance of all the

operas and the ballets for all those operas; that is what ultimately brought about the downfall of *Castor*. [...] All the other operas we have given this year were treated in the same way.’ (Letter from Dauvergne to Papillon de La Ferté, 1781.) Without doubt, some aspects of the performances of *Amadis de Gaule* were completely beyond Johann Christian Bach’s control.



The staging of *Amadis de Gaule* appears to have been quite sumptuous. ‘The sets are magnificent; the last one in particular is most stunning.’ (*Mercure de France*, December 1779, p. 198). Act I was set in ‘a forest, its trees hung with trophies; in the background a bridge, leading to a fortress’. For Act II: ‘On one side, an arid wilderness and the tomb of Ardan Canil; on the other, an old ruined palace and several prison cells.’ Then the third and final act had two different settings: ‘a pleasant island’, then the palace of Apollidon: ‘Two flights of steps lead to the entrance. The first is decorated with armed statues, while the second bears statues of elegantly dressed ladies bearing baskets of flowers.’

No trace of the décors used for *Amadis* has come down to us; for the costumes, just one illustration has survived, showing ‘un esclave’ (a slave). Furthermore, we know nothing about the work involved or who designed and made these elements. From the Opéra’s accounts for the period 1 April 1770 to 31 March 1780 (*Relevé des objets et dépenses des comptes des régies de l’Opéra du premier avril 1770 au dernier mars 1780*) we do know the total expenditure for the ‘Paintings and Decorations’: the figures indicate that the décors represented a very small part of the Académie’s overall budget, thus justifying the frequent criticism that ‘this aspect is all too much neglected in opera’ (*Mémoires secrets*, 6 December 1775). Indeed, it was common at that time to re-use already existing elements: the Opéra’s storerooms contained a number of typical, interchangeable sets, known as *tableaux*, that were simply adjusted as necessary, and new props were added to suit the libretto.

The fire that destroyed the Opéra on 8 June 1781 dealt a severe blow. The Académie Royale lost almost everything and was obliged to have a new series of all-purpose sets made without delay. Included in the list of stage scenery that survived (given in the *Relevé des décorations existantes dans les magasins de l'Opéra*) are items for *Amadis* that were probably used with older sets (a 'platform for Oriane', a 'seat for Arcabonne' and a 'group of children and clouds'). But there was also a set, intended for Act II of Bach's opera, that was listed as 'Palais ruiné dans *Amadis*'; the five frames of this set survived the fire in a state of conservation that was described as 'good'. They also appear in another list entitled *Relevé des décorations de l'Opéra qui servent actuellement au théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin* – the Opéra was based at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin from 1781 to 1794. So we know that at least one set, for Act II, was made specifically for the performances of Bach's *tragédie lyrique* in 1779. This information shows that, despite the general lack of funding for the provision of décors, special care was taken at that time to ensure that the depiction of scenes of desolation was particularly effective. The porticoes and colonnades of palaces, considered interchangeable, were readily re-used in scenes of pomp, such as the second *tableau* of Act III of *Amadis*. Deserts, ruins and hostile landscapes, on the other hand, were treated with much greater care: proportionally far fewer décors of this type were re-used. Thus, the list mentioned above also reveals the existence of the 'Désert et labyrinthe' for Gluck's *Orphée & Eurydice* and a 'Désert' for *Alceste* (both of these were saved from the fire). New and probably more innovative creations must have been expected for such scenes in operas of that time.

The inventory of 1781 leads us to make a second point: the 'Palais ruiné dans *Amadis*' must have reflected the ideas of Pierre-Adrien Pâris (*décorateur* at the Académie since 1785) and his followers: asymmetry, naturalness and 'local colour'. We remember that *Amadis* required a 'medieval' atmosphere; it was a historical work. But however original that décor may have been, it was the last *tableau* that caused a sensation in 1779. It may have been less innovative, but it made use of the machinery, flying and set changes in full view of the audience that always impressed: the *Journal*

de Paris (18 December 1779) considered that the final *tableau* ended the opera ‘most satisfactorily. The *décorateur*, very ingeniously, has three different sets in succession. The descent of the fairy Urgande has the whole of the stage filled with the flaming clouds that accompany her; the chariot rises, revealing the Arch of the Loyal Lovers, then that arch is destroyed when Amadis crosses it, making way for the blissful isle, of which Amadis is now the master. The inhabitants of the island, richly dressed, are well grouped, and present the viewer with a truly imposing spectacle’.

Other effects, however, were not quite as successful: the ghost scene in Act II, for example. In attempting to make this scene involving the supernatural more unconventionally ‘fantastic’, rather than ‘magical’, the result turned out to be trivial: ‘The moment when [Arcabonne’s] brother emerges from the tomb did not have the desired effect. The Ghost, wrapped in a large shroud, rises up surrounded by flames, but is then obliged to lie down again. The way he appeared and disappeared seemed ridiculous.’ (*Journal de Paris*, 15 December.) That was put right, however, at the next performance, which ‘was just as successful as the first’. This time ‘the old tomb was brought back, and the ghost appears and disappears as it did the last time the work was revived’ (*Journal de Paris*, 18 December). This detail confirms that all the décors for Act II of *Amadis* were ‘new’: the ‘new’ tomb must have been horizontal. Then, in response to criticism, the ‘old tomb’ (i.e. the one from the 1771 revival of *Amadis*) was re-used. It must have taken the form of a frame simulating architecture that the spectre could emerge from and return to without having to get up from a supine position. This episode reflects the hesitations at that time between moving towards greater naturalness and retaining the taste for dignity and splendour that were part and parcel of an earlier etiquette. In short, from the visual point of view, *Amadis* must have been dual, standing astride two different periods: a ‘transitional’ work, between Baroque and Romanticism.



P.H.P.
Gluck.
I.P.H.I.

Suppl. de l'Opéra de Paris

IPHIGENIE

EN TAURIDE,

Tragédie ou Quatre Actes,

Par M^r. Guillard,

MISE EN MUSIQUE ET DEDIEE

A LA REINE,

PAR

M^r. le Ch^{er}. Gluck,

1^{er} par

Représentée pour la Première fois par l'Académie Royale de Musique le mardi 18 May 1779

PRIX 40 #

A PARIS,

Au Bureau du Journal de Musique, rue Montmartre vis-à-vis celle des Vieux Augustins.

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Title page of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, which eclipsed *Amadis* in the repertoire of the Paris Opéra. Collection of the French Academy in Rome.

Page de titre d'*Iphigénie en Tauride* de Gluck, qui éclipsa *Amadis* au répertoire de l'Opéra. Collection Académie de France à Rome.